English Short Stories

**“The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson**

* **Plot**:
  + A lone-standing tradition decided who is to die
* **Setting**:
  + June 27, (ca) 1900; small farming village
  + Idyllic opening image
* **Characters**:
  + **Tessie Hutchinson**: the sore winner
  + **Mr. Summers**: organizer; working in the coal business
  + **Old Many Werner**: “Pack of crazy fools”
    - Old way of thinking
* **Tone**:
  + restrained horror; irony makes this story work
    - images of weather and children
    - “…get home in time for dinner”
    - “I thought we were going to have to get on without you, Tessie”
    - Little Davey! 9p. 166)
    - “Let’s finish quickly.”
    - “…and then they were upon her.”
* **Theme**:
  + At what point do we start questioning long-standing social conventions?
  + Morally reprehensible actions may be views otherwise if performed
    - With others
    - On a grand scale
    - Or as part of a formal program

**“The Shot” by Aleksandr Pushkin**

* **Pushkin**:
  + Founder of modern Russian literature, considered greatest Russian poet
  + Introduced natural speech
  + Challenged wife’s alleged lover to a duel; mortally wounded
  + A small planet disc. In 1977 and a crater on Mercury bear his name
* **Setting**:
  + Rural Russia, 19th Century
* **Narration, Tone**:
  + 1st person, minor, favors Sylvia
* **Plot**:
  + Silvio takes his unconventional revenge when the time is right
* 1817
  + Faro game, insult, challenge
  + Narrator upset
  + Silvio receives a letter; leaves for 2nd duel with count
* 1811 (flash back)
  + Silvio meets Count, slay, 1st duel
  + Silvio and Count owed a shot
* 1822
  + Narrator is a farmer, visits the count
  + Silvio’s name comes up, flashback to 1817
  + Last paragraph – Count’s home
  + Sylvio’s death (1821)
* **Characters**:
  + **Silvio**: 25, well respected, former soldier
    - “hero of some mysterious tale” 2nd, 3rd paragraphs
    - Romanticized; never suspected of cowardice
    - Sullen, silent by nature
    - Expert shot
  + **Count**: young noble, handsome, Sylvio jealous?
  + **Narrator**: admires Sylvio; fair to count
* **Theme**:
  + Revenge can be all consuming
  + Victory in combat/conflict is not always heroic
  + What do we know of the people we admire?

**“The Three Day Blow” Ernest Hemingway**

* Hemingway Code Hero:
  + Drinks
  + Disillusioned by WWI
  + Man of action
    - Thinking and talking takes away importance of the act
  + Skilled, detests mediocrity
  + Lives to gratify desires
  + Exhibits self-discipline
  + Loyal to people, not abstract concepts
  + Keeps busy at night to avoid sleep
  + Doesn’t talk about beliefs
  + Views are shaped by death
    - Avoid death at all costs
    - Man discovers his potential in presence of death
    - “grace under pressure”
* **Plot**: Nick and Bill drink scotch and discuss weather, baseball, drinking, literature and fishing and (finally) lost love.
* **Setting**: a hunting lodge in Michigan in the fall
  + A storm as a symbol? – yes, the wind carries things away
* **Point of View**: 3rd person omniscient, cold, objective
* **Tone**: stoic, cold, numb, nihilistic, a bit mocking
* **Style**: short, clipped sentences
* **Characters**:
  + **Nick Adams**: (recurring Hemingway character)
    - Sad, confused about losing Marge
    - Initiated drinking; gradually finds relief
    - Nothing is irrevocable
  + **Bill**-glad that Marge is gone
    - Macho, aggressive, dogmatic; almost nihilistic
* **Theme**: look to the Hemingway hero
  + Be strong in the face of an irrational, malevolent existence
  + What can be done about lost live?
    - Get over it
    - Try and find it again?
  + We must weather internal and external storms
  + How do “real men” bond?

**The Jockey by Carson McCullers**

* **Plot**: Bitsy Barlow vents his anger and frustration at his (perceived) tormentors
* **Setting**: dining room in Saratoga; August, height of the racing season
* **Point of View**:3rd person, omniscient, impartial
  + Torment for jockey because he is in a dining room and he cannot eat
* **Tone**: sad, grotesque (watching a person self-destruct)
  + Most jockeys don’t have front teeth because of throwing up to lose weight, Acid from throw up breaks down the teeth
* **Characters**: Bitsy: “crazy,” bitter, self-destructive (gaining weight) childish; wears silk its light, aerodynamic; and celebrative

**“The Standard of Living” by Dorothy Parker**

* **Plot**: two poor working girls indulge in a world of make-believe and are shocked by reality, only to retreat further unto illusion
* **Setting**: 5th Ave, NYC; Sat afternoon, 1930s
* **Point of View**: 3rd person, omniscient, critical
* **Tone**: Mocks, criticizes girl’s values
  + Compliments from men
  + Awkward encounter with store clerk
* **Characters**:
  + Annabel ($18.50 a week) and Midge ($16 a week)
    - Superficial, look-alike stenographers
    - Poor taste (opening paragraph)
    - Help support family
    - Can’t handle reality
* **Theme**: Illusion can conquer reality if you let it

**“The Saint” by VS Pritchett**

* Who/what is the Saint? Why?
  + Mr. Timberlake because he so adheres to his faith that he is like a saint, he was covered with yellow pollen- Sarcasm
* **Plot**: a man recalls losing
* **Setting**: rural England
* **Point of View**: 1st person, limited
* **Characters**:
  + **Narrator**:
    - 17, inquisitive, suspicious, impressionable
    - Mixed feeling toward Timberlake
    - Thinks the religion is a scam
    - At one point he liked Timberlake
  + **Timberlake**:
    - Dull, middle-aged “miracle worker”
    - Former insurance salesman
    - “golden he sat”
* **Tone**: Satirical, sarcastic (title itself)
  + “The man paid some capital into my uncle’s business and we were converted”
  + Toronto references
  + Timberlake as saintly
  + Recurring ape
* **Theme**:
  + Criticism of false religion, of using religion as a superficial answer to difficult questions
  + Where does evil come from?

**“The Garden Party” by Katherine Mansfield**

* **Katherine Mansfield** (1888-1923)
  + Regarded as a master of the short story
  + Focuses on characterization, not plot
  + Depicted trivial events and subtle changes in human behavior
  + Led bohemian life and focused on young adult women, focusing the reality of their constricted lives
* **Point of View**: 3rd person omniscient
  + “She loved to arrange things; she always felt she could do it better than anyone else.”
* **Setting**: Colonial New Zealand: Sheridan garden, the Carter’s home
* **Tone**: Prejudicial, sentimental, condescending, opulent
* **Characters**:
  + **Jose**: Laura’s sister, helps to establish the Sheridan sphere of dominance, self-interest, and prejudice
    - “If you are going to stop a band playing every time someone has an accident, you’ll lead a very strenuous life.”
    - “You won’t being a drunken workman back to life by being sentimental”
  + **Mrs. Sheridan**-Matriarch, the attitude and voice of the privileged
    - People like that don’t accept sacrifices from people like us
    - Distrustful
  + **Laura**: Fundamentally shallow
    - “How very nice the workmen are!”
    - Mocked on several occasions
    - Sentimental, impressionable
    - “But we can’t possible have a garden party with a man dead just outside the front gate”
    - “Forgive my hat”
    - “Isn’t life…”- Revelation? Irony? Identity formation?
* **Theme**: “How marvelous life is, even a poor miserable life”
  + Class distinction cannot exist without being reinforced
  + What good are feelings without action

**“The Other Side of the Hedge” by EM Forster**

* Edward Morgan Forster (1879-1970)
  + Short story characteristics:
    - Exposes a character to new experiences🡪character is transformed and put in opposition to petty environment of contemporaries
  + Antheses:
    - Natural man vs. inhibited man
    - Pagan vs. Christian
  + “Fantasies”: Gulf separates reality from illusion
    - Protagonist has a better vision of life
  + “Epiphany”-requires questioning with mind, active imaginations dissatisfied with conventional attitudes
    - Protagonist is never the same after the vision
* **Plot**: a “racer” leaves the road, enters a garden, resists, and then accepts
* **Style**: allegory – a short story with a lot of symbolism
* **Setting**: vague, near London
  + World he leaves: dirty, dusty road; purposeless, focused on progress and advancement; skeptical, focused on technology; tiring; unfriendly, competitive
  + Other side: lush, blue sky; people are happy and joyful; it is old but youthful; no focus on competition; doesn’t rely on technology, brother lives on the other side
* **Tone**: critical, serious
* **Symbols**:
  + **Dry road**: unproductive, competitive which results in nothing
  + **Pool of water**: cleansing, re-birth, purification, a barrier (Physical), cancels out technology, nature rules
  + **Purposeless running, singing**: free living, humanity
  + **Drink, slumber**: rest, relaxation, surrender
* **Characters**:
  + **Narrator**: tired, competitive, sarcastic, selfish, a rationalist, set in his ways, capable of cruelty, unhappy, can not really deal with the other side, resistant, ultimately he finds his brother
  + **Helper**: welcoming, hospitable, generous, friendly, old but young, opened up narrator’s eyes
* **Theme**: Is competition good for humanity? – Yes
  + Does technology promote progress? –Yes
  + Why does the narrator want to return to the road he hates? – it was familiar
  + Maybe paradise isn’t even perfect

**“Graven Image” by John O’Hara**

* **Plot**: Browning seeks a job from Joe, a college acquaintance, by coddling his defensiveness, but fails after offending Joe
* **Setting**: power lunch; DC hotel: 1938
* **Point of View**: 3rd person omniscient, some sarcasm
* **Characters**:
  + **Joe** (under secretary, Mr. Secretary):
    - “…it was a long time coming, but sooner or later all of them…”
      * Foreshadowing
    - Mock’s the upper-class
    - Still sore at the park?
  + **Charles Browning**
    - “…but that’s water under the bridge – or is it?”
    - “Why not go to one of his ‘Racquet Club’ friends?”
    - Thinks Joe should be thankful for the Park
    - Says the wrong thing at the wrong time
* **Graven Images**:
  + Political deals made on the strength of social position and money
  + Browning’s gold pig-“I still carry it” (Harvard’s Porcelain Club: oldest men’s club in America, secret knocks; read classics and drink old scotch; major networking)
* **Theme**:
  + A sense of inferiority, defensiveness, and/or bitterness can make one vulnerable
  + Some differences between people will never change or be forgotten
  + Dignity may derive from sources other than the self
  + Some favors might be done with ulterior motives
    - Bad